

# Socialist Standard

Political Football  
Election Analysis  
School Dinners  
Solidarity  
Iran  
Art in Socialism

June 2005 Vol. 101 No. 1210 £1

## Capitalism & Football

### Manchester United Faces The Penalty





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**"Iran has to be warned by US gangster imperialists - don't mess with our interests; don't run a racket on our turf without our permission; don't deal with another mob."**

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## Sound and fury, but no change

**W**ar movies traditionally end with a wide-shot of a carnage-strewn battlefield, with the weary, tattered and bloodied victors staring glazedly across it, wondering about the pointlessness of it all. Was it really worth the valour, the bloodshed, the aches and the pains?

So too was the image of the newly re-elected Labour government, as its foot-soldiers clambered leadenly on to the summit of their high command's chosen objective, Third Term Hill. Never before has the Labour Party succeeded in claiming this prize - all other attempts were wrecked by landmines and pit-falls like wages policies, unemployment, national debt, and the like.

Under Tony Blair's leadership the Labourites realised that even presenting a minimal challenge to capitalist orthodoxy would fatally undermine their charge. Instead, they have stuck behind him as they marched single file up the straight and narrow path of capitalist politics, and thus their faction of the Capitalist Party has managed to scale the heights once more.

The voters rewarded their adherence to capitalism. The message of the election was - forget war, forget asylum, forget council tax, the British electorate overwhelmingly expressed their support for the wages system's continuing existence. Certainly, these other issues caused a few Labour extras to die suitably dramatic deaths by the wayside, but the heroic brothers and sisters of New Labour

are now definitively over the hill.

From that vantage point, they can see the eternal struggles before them. Looming economic slow down, which will crush their 'No return to boom and bust' armour. Their shield of the NHS will get smashed by the increased need to build up private sector health facilities. Their troops will grow mutinous as Major Blunkett will order them to fire on their pensions - a desperate attack on workers' pay and conditions to protect capital's profits.

The Labour Party has been in office for eight years now. The old Tory governing elite are in tatters, yet nothing has changed. Labour accepts and applauds the need for profits. But the demands of the state for money are tempered by the fact that the only way to get it is by digging into the profits of the capitalists.

In a social system geared towards making profits for the wealth owners any policy that cuts into profits will cause the sort of political turbulence that has wrecked previous Labour governments. To try and appease their base - to build the 'public services' they have put at the heart of their campaigns - they have had to increasingly turn to the private sector, to showing private capitalists how they can take a cut of the tax cake if they join the state in providing the services.

This happy alliance has seen Public Private Partnerships (PPP) and Public Finance Initiatives (PFI) meaning that the state has not had to increase its nominal size along with its real size. The wealth stays firmly in the hands of the private

capitalists. That has been New Labour's secret weapon. So long as the economic weather held, this alliance was good. If that weather changes - the unpredictable

uncontrollable economic cycle turns nasty - then Labour will have to choose between eating into diminishing profits or turning their fire on the workers and voters who put them in office. Not that there's any doubt about which option they will go for.

Their new found focus on unmeasurable things like 'respect' - which sounds remarkably like John Major's 'Back to Basics' - means their devotion to sound and fury has increased. The hollow bugle calls of a desperate commander trying to sound in control.

That glorious leader, though, is now fatally wounded - a Nelson tenderly kissed by his hardy Lieutenant Brown. He will quit the field to retire to his millionaire lifestyle as reward for service tendered. While he limps on, though, voices from the Labour back will begin to murmur - what was the point? Why all the bluster, the fighting and battling just to take another forsaken hill in a pointless political war that makes a lot of noise about making very little change?

Until the banner of a consciously socialist movement, though, takes the field what looks like a war movie to some, will remain a horror flick for the rest of us.



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# Would people in socialism spend all day voting on everything?

A socialist society will be one in which all people will be free to participate fully in the process of making and implementing policy. Whether decisions about constructing a new playground, the need to improve fish stocks in the North Sea, or if we should use nanobots to improve our lives, everyone everywhere will be able to voice their opinion and cast their vote. However, the practical ramifications of this democratic principle could be enormous. If people feel obliged to opine and vote on every matter of policy they would have little time to do anything else. On the other hand, leaving the decision-making process to a system of elected executive groups or councils could be seen as going against the principle of fully participatory democracy. If socialism is going to maintain the practice of inclusive decision making (which does not put big decisions in the hands of small groups) but without generating a crisis of choice, then a solution is required, and it seems that capitalism may have produced one in the form of 'collaborative filtering' (CF) software.

This technology is currently used on the internet where a crisis of choice already exists. Faced with a super-abundance of products and services, CF helps consumers choose what to buy and navigate the huge numbers of options. It starts off by collecting data on an individual's preferences, extrapolates patterns from this and then produces recommendations based on that person's likes and dislikes. If you have already made purchases via the internet then you are probably familiar with the statement 'People who liked this product also liked...', which is CF at work. As well as making recommendation on what you should buy, it also suggests what you may like to watch on telly, what concert to attend or where to go on holiday.

With suitable modification, this



## Could too much voting be bad for you?

technology could be of use to socialism - not to help people decide what to consume, but which matters of policy to get involved in. A person's tastes, interests, skills, and academic achievements, rather than their shopping traits, could be put through the CF process and matched to appropriate areas of policy in the resulting list of recommendations. A farmer, for example, may be recommended to vote upon matters which affect him/her, and members of the local community, directly, or of which s/he is likely to have some knowledge, such as increasing yields of a particular crop, the use of GM technology, or the responsible use of land by ramblers.

The technology would also put them in touch with other people of similar interests so that issues can be thrashed out more fully, and may even inform them that 'People who voted on this issue also voted on...'

The question is, would a person be free to ignore the recommendations and vote on matters s/he has little knowledge of, or indeed not vote at all? Technology cannot resolve issues of responsibility, but any system, computer software or not, which helps reduce the potential burden of decision making to manageable levels would



## Exclusive, inconvenient, time-consuming and ... old hat.

## How would people vote?

The traditional image of huge crowds with their hands up in council meetings, or queues of people lining up to put a piece of paper in a box, is obviously becoming old-fashioned, even in capitalism. The UK government, along with many others, has been toying for a long time with the idea of greater public participation through e-democracy and e-voting. Many MPs already maintain websites and many more are being encouraged to interact with the public in this way.

Noting the enthusiasm of young people to use telephone and online voting in TV competitions, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister thinks e-voting could have a major effect on turn-out in the hard-to-reach youth age group. Stephen Coleman, professor of e-democracy at the Oxford Internet Institute, regards this as a dubious aim and claim, instead arguing that the relationship between MPs and people has to change throughout the period of government, not just at elections: "The relationship is changing. Politicians who don't use the internet will miss out and will eventually fall by the wayside", he said. (BBC News technology, Tues, May 17)

Even allowing that MPs take the professor's advice, it seems unlikely that an appearance of greater participation

will actually translate into genuine participation, given that capitalism is only interested in giving us a say when the issue at stake doesn't really matter. Nonetheless, capitalism's drive to make its democratic forms look more participatory may be doing socialism's work for it, so that in the future the technology to debate, dispute, appeal, complain, conference and vote will all be in place - at the touch of a phone button.

# Red Snapper

## Sound bites and unsound nibbles

**I don't look like a millionaire, I don't act like a millionaire, I am not a millionaire."**

*George Galloway, REPECT MP, ahead of addressing the Washington senators who have accused him of receiving vouchers for millions of barrels of oil from Saddam Hussein's regime. Daily Mail, May 17th.*

**They chose me. Can't you find it even within yourself even to congratulate me?"**

*George Galloway again on his election victory to Jeremy Paxman, from The Guardian, May 7th.*

**We expect the Revolution will create entirely new genres to expand the definition of video games,"** he said to loud cheers in the hall.

*Nintendo president Satoru Iwata, on a new console, BBC Technology, May 17*

**People remembered why they had lost trust in Tony Blair, but they couldn't see any real difference between the Tories and Labour, so we lost out on that."**

*Lynton Crosby, Tory Party campaign director, Independent, May 20*

**A student who misbehaves gets two verbal warnings, then detention for one hour and finally a day in the isolation unit. It is very rare that a student gets sent there for three days.**

*Sir Dexter Hutt, executive headmaster of three schools in Birmingham, where he has introduced isolation rooms, Sunday Times, May 15*

# COMING UP

**How free is our free time?** Socialist ideas often focus on the nature of employment in capitalism. But what about our time away from work, when we try to forget about our unfulfilling or stressful jobs? How does the capitalist system – and its ideology – influence what we do in the evenings and at weekends? We might go to the pub. Or the football ground. Or the cinema. Or we might just smoke a joint and watch the parade of celebrities on television. The media plays a massive part in our culture. Television, the internet, newspapers and magazines – all offer us windows on the rest of the world. But this comes at a price when what we see is shaped by the capitalist preoccupations of media giants like the BBC and the Fox Network. However, even within the mainstream media, anti-capitalist ideas can sometimes break through, in popular music as well as in investigative journalism.

**Our weekend of talks and discussion looks at how entertainment and culture in capitalism shape our ideas and behaviour, reinforcing our acceptance of the status quo.**

We also discuss how we might entertain ourselves in a socialist society. Would there be less of a distinction between entertainment and work, as William Morris argued?

**What culture would we create without the dictates of big business?**

Residential attendance (inc. accommodation and all meals) costs £110. Non-residential attendance (inc. most meals) costs

£30. Concessionary rates are available. To confirm your booking, send a cheque or postal order for £10 made out to the Socialist Party of Great Britain to Ron Cook, 11 Dagger Lane, West Bromwich, B71 4BT. State whether you require a single or twin room and vegetarian meals, and include your contact details. For more details, tel. 0121 553 1712 or e-mail [yes-utopia@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:yes-utopia@blueyonder.co.uk)



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- The News Media**—Steve Trott
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# The Political Football

*In the market economy money talks, and US tycoon Malcolm Glazer has shouted the loudest.*

**T**he recent success of Malcolm Glazer, the US tycoon, in gaining a 75 per cent controlling interest in Manchester United has once again propelled the club into the media spotlight, and for reasons most of its fans find abhorrent. Long used to the idea that United was 'their' club, they have found out that what seemed to be 'their' club was not really theirs at all. It is, of course a common and understandable illusion: 'our street' is an expression of affinity more than a statement regarding ownership, 'our town', 'our city' and 'our club' likewise.

It is clear that the vast majority of Manchester United fans oppose the Glazer takeover, and many thousands have worked tirelessly to try and stop it, but to little effect. In the market economy money talks, and Glazer has shouted the loudest.

In a sense, the fears of United fans are understandable. Although Glazer claims to be a United fan there is little evidence of this (his interest previously has been in US baseball) and a lot of evidence that he is really in it just to make money. Most of the capital he has used to buy his stake in the club is loan capital, most likely amounting to around £540 million if reports are to be believed, and he is keen to recoup these monies and pay off his creditors as quickly as possible. One of his key aims appears to be to ensure that what is already the most recognisable brand name in football has an even wider audience and depth of penetration in terms of its marketing and merchandising across the world. The other is to negotiate separate, lucrative TV deals for the club outside of the existing arrangements for the Premiership and other competitions. Overturning the existing financial set-up at United by stealth and angering the long-existing and highly successful management team are by-products of a wider game plan - to make more profit out of an already highly profitable venture.

## Administration

Whatever problems face Manchester United at present, they pale into insignificance compared to those of many of the clubs lower down the food chain. The collapse of ITV Digital financially devastated a number of Football League clubs, to whom they were the principal sponsor, and in total more than 30 league clubs have now gone into administration in recent years - over a third. The creation of the Premier League had previously exacerbated an already existing tendency for the rich clubs to get richer while the poorer ones got poorer, and the collapse of ITV Digital was almost the last nail in the coffin for many.

As football clubs across the UK ailed, so the vultures circled. And most of those vultures took the form of property speculators, attracted by the land that was the principal asset of the clubs. Clydebanks,

**“football has become infested by the sort of parasites whose idea of fun is making money”**

Wimbledon, Chester and York are just three of the clubs who became notable victims of these predators, with Clydebanks being killed off by them completely.

The stories of two other clubs though are more illustrative than most, combining many of the defining characteristics of institutions that fall prey to the worst aspects of market forces at work in sport. Both are also smaller clubs that have nevertheless punched above their weight in footballing terms and have a higher profile than their size might otherwise suggest, both have occupied land in prime positions

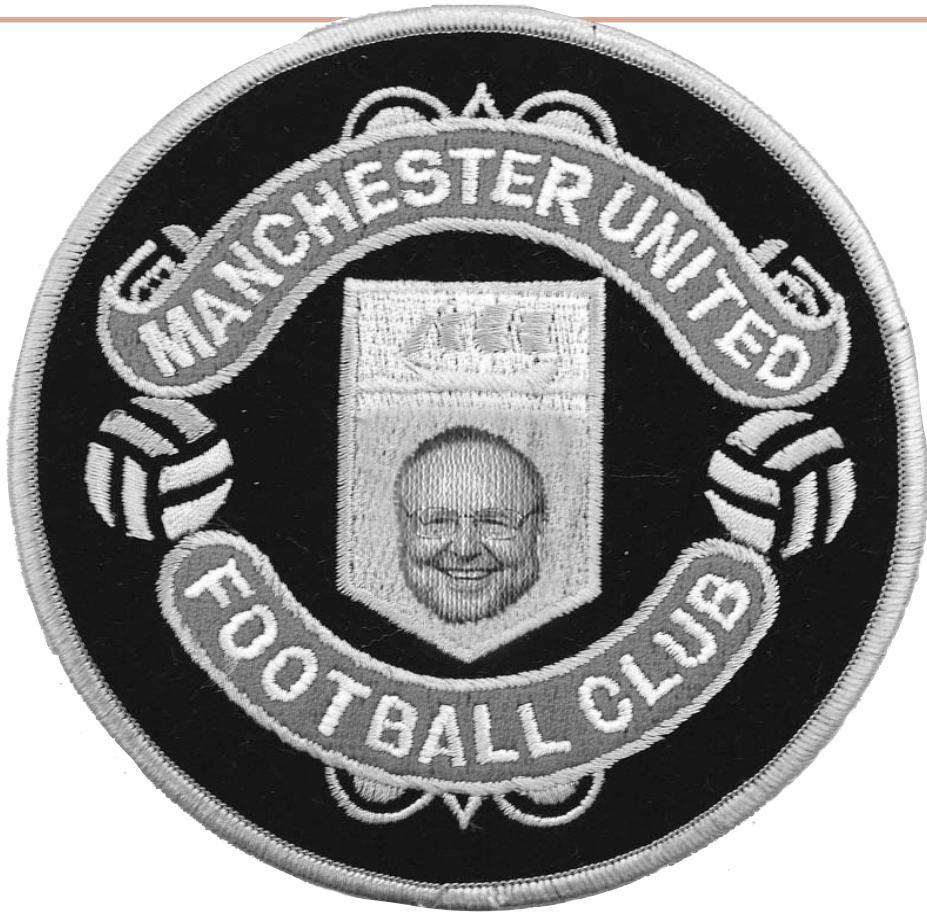
with a high redevelopment potential, and both have been subjected to highly underhand takeovers that have driven them - possibly deliberately - to the brink of financial ruin.

## Brighton

Brighton and Hove Albion is a club that has now been in crisis for ten years, following the sale of their former home, the Goldstone Ground, a sale which was pushed through without the club having another ground to play at. The two men responsible for this were the Chief Executive David Bellotti and club director Bill Archer. Bellotti, a former Liberal Democrat MP for neighbouring Eastbourne, showed that the Lib Dems are not all about respect for the environment and high ideals associated with fighting for the worst off in society - the Goldstone Ground became a retail park dominated by a Burger King and Bellotti was literally chased out of the ground in Brighton's last season there by irate fans.

After a hugely unsuccessful groundshare at Gillingham, Brighton returned home to their present site at the Withdean Stadium, little more than an athletics track with a pitch in the middle and some temporary stands. For a variety of logistical reasons, the only really viable venue for Brighton's proposed new ground is on land at Falmer just outside the city, and for several years now a running battle has ensued to try and secure permission for the club to move there, culminating in a lengthy and messy public enquiry and then the involvement of the Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott.

While the move to Falmer may still be some way off, what is most interesting about the Brighton story is not just the way in which the club was fleeced to line the pockets of property developers and kicked out of its ground, but the way in which their fans organised themselves to ensure the club's survival. They became the backbone





**A United fan makes her point**

of the Fans United organisation which fights for the interests of football fans in the UK and attempts (increasingly successfully) to encourage fans to leave their tribal loyalties aside and to support club's battling against hostile takeovers and property speculators.

### **Wrexham**

Wrexham FC's fight against property speculators is more recent and the club still occupies its Racecourse Ground home, albeit under notice of eviction. In 2002 a majority stakeholding in the club was secretly bought by a company owned by Alex Hamilton, a former struck-off solicitor from Manchester, who - without making his ownership public - installed his then business partner Mark Guterman as chairman and front man. Guterman already

had a dubious record as the man who took local rivals Chester City into administration after wages and Inland Revenue demands had gone unpaid and the water board had arrived to cut off the supply.

Within a couple of years exactly the same sequence of events unfolded at Wrexham until the club's fans organised a 'red card protest' directed at Guterman at their last home match of the 2003-4 season, interestingly enough against Brighton, whose fans supported it enthusiastically having been in a similar situation themselves. At this point Hamilton sacked Guterman and installed himself as Chairman, having already been outed as the real owner of the club, and after secret plans to redevelop part of the Racecourse land and rotate the pitch 90 degrees had been uncovered.

Since then developments have been peculiar enough to have graced the plot lines of the likes of Dallas or Dynasty. Hamilton, whose bizarre antics in life had years before been unmasked by *Private Eye*, was revealed to have transferred ownership of the Racecourse Ground and surrounding land from the club itself to one of his own companies for the princely sum of one pound. This happened without consulting the Wrexham FC shareholders, thereby stripping the club of its major asset in an act described by BBC's *Week In Week Out* as 'completely illegal'. In an increasingly bizarre series of events he was banned from the ground by the police on matchdays, described Wrexham fans as 'luddites', 'lowlife' and 'detritus' and stated that his battle with them to remove the club from the Racecourse was 'the most fun I've had with my clothes on since I was 21 years of age'.

The club's remaining directors eventually forced his resignation from the chairmanship which then allowed them to put the club into the relative safety of administration, from which position the administrators have so far managed to resist Hamilton's attempts to move the bulldozers in and raze the site for a retail development

- a development that could net him as much as £15 million for a paltry initial outlay. A legal battle over owed money with former chum Mark Guterman is ongoing, as are police investigations reportedly into missing gate receipts, under-declared attendances and other irregularities, recently culminating in a High Court injunction battle by Guterman and Hamilton over access to audio tapes made by a Wrexham fan.

### **Money talks**

While someone like Hamilton may be a highly idiosyncratic individual, he represents something much more routine about the world of business. In a society where common endeavour and shared identity count for little where there is a quick buck to be made, it can be no surprise that football has become infested by the sort of parasites whose idea of fun is making money, especially at other people's expense. The market economy creates the conditions in which they can prosper and seize control of assets that communities often mistakenly think are theirs already. The people of Brighton, Wrexham and many others towns and cities across Britain have recently been finding this out the hard way.

One encouraging aspect of this though is the vigorous resistance people have had to offer and of the radicalisation of their ideas in the process. 'Kick Property Speculators Out of Football' and 'Football Not Profit' are the kind of banners that are currently seen at soccer grounds up and down the country, indicative of another groping attempt by the victims of the market economy to make sense of what is happening and to identify problems to be overcome.

Unfortunately, those problems can never be overcome within the confines of a system that rewards vultures like Glazer at United, Archer and Bellotti at Brighton and Hamilton at Wrexham as a matter of course, and which summons up new rich pickings for parasites to squabble over on a seemingly daily basis. ■

**DAP**



### **Cooking the Books (1)**

## **What is like gravity?**

Where you have generalised production for the market, the production and distribution of wealth

escapes from human control and comes to be dominated by economic laws - such as "no profit, no production", "minimise costs", "maximise profits", "accumulate more and more capital" - which impose themselves on those taking day-to-day economic decisions as if they were natural laws.

In fact, early students of how the capitalist economy worked such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo thought that they really were studying natural laws, but Marx pointed out that this was only the appearance: the economic laws of capitalism only arose out of the particular social and economic basis of capitalism under which the means of production belonged to a minority class and where

everything was produced for sale on a market with a view to profit. If capitalism were to be abolished, these economic laws would cease to operate; on the other hand, they would continue to operate as long as capitalism existed.

In this sense Colin Hines, an economic adviser to the Green Party, was right when he wrote in the *Guardian* (25 April) that "Globalisation is not like gravity", meaning by globalisation the effects of the pressures exerted on the home economy by competition on the world market:

"The fact that countries with higher costs haven't a hope of competing with those where labour is cheap seems crushingly obvious".

Yes, it is, and this is one of the economic laws of capitalism, but he then went on:

"Yet in Britain, only one party has grasped it: the Greens. They have realised that to help workers worldwide we



must stop gearing economies to ruthlessly out-compete each other. We need new goals: maximising self-reliance and ensuring that trade rules are governed by a pro-poor approach . . . Trade rules must be rewritten to discriminate in favour of domestic production".

But the existing trade rules, as for instance embodied in and enforced by the World Trade Organisation, are not just a voluntary policy option, but essentially a reflection of the economic laws of capitalism. Globalisation may not be like gravity, but it's not like putty either. In fact, as long as capitalism lasts, it is like gravity. If the Green Party thinks that the trade

rules/economic laws of capitalism can be changed so as to stop ruthless competition on the world market, and to be governed by a "pro-poor approach" or to permanently discriminate in favour of higher-cost domestic production, then they must be living on a different globe to the rest of us.

# That was democracy, was it?

It is great to live in a democracy. Fantastic that we are so free that 22 percent of us can elect a government that will rule for up to five years - and if we disagree with its policies we can be told, "You had a choice, we were democratically elected, after all." It isn't as if these democratic rulers aren't aware of the gaps in their theories. The famously defeated Foot-led Labour Party of 1983 went into the election hoping for just such an outcome, to squeak into government on the back of a splintered national vote.

The gremlins of parliamentary party politics, though, simply refuse to go away. Politicians threaten and blackmail us - let us be bastards to you or find out just how much worse the other lot will be. The out parties can make great play of the high crimes and misdemeanours of the ins, and the great merry-go-round continues. They talk about resurgence, recovery, growth, and carve their faces into sombre masks to show just how seriously we should take them.

Of course, now we'll hear witterings about introducing proportional



**But how many ended up voting Labour anyway?**

representation - Labour's trump card to keep the Tories out forever. Their manifesto hinted obliquely at the possibility - they promised a referendum on further constitutional change, without mentioning what that might be. That would not, though, make any real difference.

The whole system is set up to remove political power from the hands of the voters as much and for as long as they will put up with it. The Iraq war is an excellent case in point. We are always being told that elections are a time to hold governments to account. Yet, when the election came, Labour made it clear that voters would be cutting off their nose to spite their face if they voted Labour out and (the only likely alternative) the Tories in. Imagine if banks worked this way: you give us all your

## Democracy as it is and as it could be

Many people would argue that Britain is a democracy and that we all benefit from living in a democratic society. By this they would probably mean the regular holding of elections to parliament and local councils, the freedom to organise political parties, a press which is not beholden to the government, and the rule of law. If people object to the policies of the government or a particular MP, they can vote them out of office. If they oppose a

with dictatorships, where elections may be non-existent or a sham, where independent parties and trade unions are outlawed, where the press just follow the government line, and arbitrary arrest and even torture are commonplace. Such comparisons are by no means valueless, and capitalist democracy is definitely useful to workers, yet the idea that elections and the other points listed above in themselves constitute democracy needs a great deal of reflection.

For do the trappings of democracy, as we might call them, really guarantee a truly democratic way of life? Do they ensure 'rule by the people', which is the etymology of 'democracy'? Socialists argue that the answer to these questions is a resounding 'no!', that real democracy - a social democracy, as it might be called - involves far more. The problem is that under a capitalist system there is a built-in lack of democracy, which cannot be overturned or compensated for by holding elections or permitting protest groups. Our objections are far more basic than suggestions that proportional representation is the best electoral system.

In the first place, capitalism involves an inevitable inequality, between on the one hand those who have to work for a living or who depend on a family member who does so, and on the other



**Political prisoners - liberal democracy could be better, and it could be worse**

specific action by a local council, they can set up a protest group and hold demonstrations, without the fear of being carted off to prison just for voicing their views.

In this, comparisons would be drawn

those who own enough land, shares or bonds that they have no need to work. This is a division between two classes, the working class and the capitalist class, between those who do the useful work but are paid a pittance and those who live a life of luxury in country houses, posh flats and expensive clubs and restaurants. Those who have more money have more power and more control than those who have far, far less. This is partly a matter of mere wealth: if I have one hundred times as much money as you, then I have far more say over how I spend my time, where I live, what my children can experience, and so on. Workers have to struggle with a mortgage, fear of redundancy or a monotonous job, and have far less control over their lives. So poverty and inequality of wealth undermines any claims that capitalism can be democratic.

But there is more to be said. The capitalist class have power not just over their own lives but over those of workers as well. They can order the closure of factories, as at Rover or Marconi, the building of a new motorway, the invasion of another country, all of which can affect the workers who will lose their jobs, suffer noise and disruption, or have to fight and die on behalf of their masters. The press may be formally 'free', but in practice newspapers are owned by capitalists and so will naturally reflect pro-capitalist views in their

**"The problem is that under a capitalist system there is a built-in lack of democracy"**

money, we spend it for you and you can sack us afterwards if you don't like the way we spent it. No one would buy that deal, surely, yet they do, at every election.

The vote was too blunt an instrument to express any opinion on the war, all it could ask was which of the parties seen to be in contention did voters want to see in charge.

In the old Soviet Union people could vote. They faced a fixed choice, though, either for or against the sole Communist Party candidate. Cold warriors, correctly, condemned this as a sham of democracy. Yet in Britain, where three parties receive blanket media coverage year round, and even during the election campaign, we are told we have a genuine free choice.

The impression that everyone else is going to vote for one of these parties means that people become unwilling to vote for a fringe party. Effectively, the mass media is a free co-ordinating mechanism, sending signals between voters letting them know how their neighbours will vote so they can think of how best - pragmatically - to use their vote. Those not voting for the top two candidates in any given constituency may as well spoil their ballot, for all it effects the outcome of the election.

### **Mistaken identity**

There are, though, other short cuts to this sort of co-ordination. Instead of building a community of ideas, a party may find existing groups and try and use them as a basis for building their vote. Thuswise the ill-named RESPECT coalition, of the erstwhile Trotskyists of the SWP and litigious ex-Labour bully-boy and friend of dictators George Galloway has tried to harness the anti-war movement and Muslim workers to their ends.

Instead of appealing to them as workers, they appeal to them according to their prejudices, assuaging their mis-identification of themselves with their ideas rather than with their way of life. Other parties have tried a similar tactic - the BNP claim to defend 'White British Culture' from the depredations of multi-culturalism. This in turn is a response to both Labour and Tories trying the same trick with a multi-cultural identity of Britishness. All of them, leaders looking for followers.

Behind the swirl, smoke and bluster of identity politics and electoral nose counting lies the issue that dare not speak its name: class. Class requires people to examine how they live, not how they feel. It automatically implies conflict and division, something that someone who wants to harvest all votes they can, come what may, would not

care to invoke. You don't win friends by disagreeing with people. You don't change their minds by agreeing with them.

What this masks is that we live in a society where a tiny minority must protect its own interests from those of a vast majority. Democracy is anathema to the owners of property, because they want to retain the benefits of that property for themselves. No matter how little our say in government is, we have still less say over the use and allocation of wealth in our world - the real decisions that matter. Were the capitalist class to lose their tight rein on the state, it could become a threat to their position. Small elites and hierarchies are easier to manage than free flowing and open democracies.

Democracy is not about a constrained choice once every four years, in winner takes all elections. Democracy means having the opportunity to intervene in making proposals, amending them and finally deciding upon them - as well as in implementing them. The more people can exercise a say in those actions, the more democratic the process becomes.

Information must flow freely, so all can have an opportunity of reaching a decision, of judging the performance of delegates and appointees, of deciding to challenge the actions of one body in a higher authority; and in real democracy, the higher authorities are those bodies which contain more members of the community concerned. Everyday life must be the signalling system that lets people know what their fellows want, the way of co-ordinating votes and decisions.

A society of common ownership would have no need of constricting decision-making. We would share a common interest, and most people's actions and decisions would be immediately related to their day-to-day outcomes. Democracy would be an everyday process, just as the management of workplaces is now for the appointees of the owners. Just as appointees now are accountable to and removable by the owners, when we own all the wealth in common we will have structures to ensure that we retain control of all decision-making levels where we feel we have need to intervene, not ritualistically handing that control over to rulers periodically.

As it is, though, we continue with Tony Blair blathering about building a society of, er, respect - because that's all he can do, he has no control of the passing show in the hands of the property owners. This will last, though, only as long as the workers tolerate it. It's up to us to keep disagreeing with them. ■

### **PIK SMEET**



**Capitalism's real voting papers**

pages. The government, too, is there to administer the system on behalf of the capitalists, something they do irrespective of which party is occupying 10 Downing Street.

In fact, though, there is a sense in which the government does not run the system at all - rather, the capitalist system runs the government, by limiting the actions that can be taken. The capitalists and their governments can propose what they like, but it is the capitalist economy that disposes. Raising of interest rates, increased unemployment, devaluation -

general. And they are at the mercy of an economic system that goes its own sweet way without being subject to the control of those who suffer under it.

In contrast, Socialists advocate a way of organising society that will result in real democracy, where people genuinely run their own lives and are not pushed around by bosses. Firstly, Socialism will do away with the inequality of capitalism. With free access to what has been produced, everybody (that's absolutely everybody) will be able to decide on their own consumption, living conditions, and so on. There will no longer be a forced 'choice' between a new car and a summer

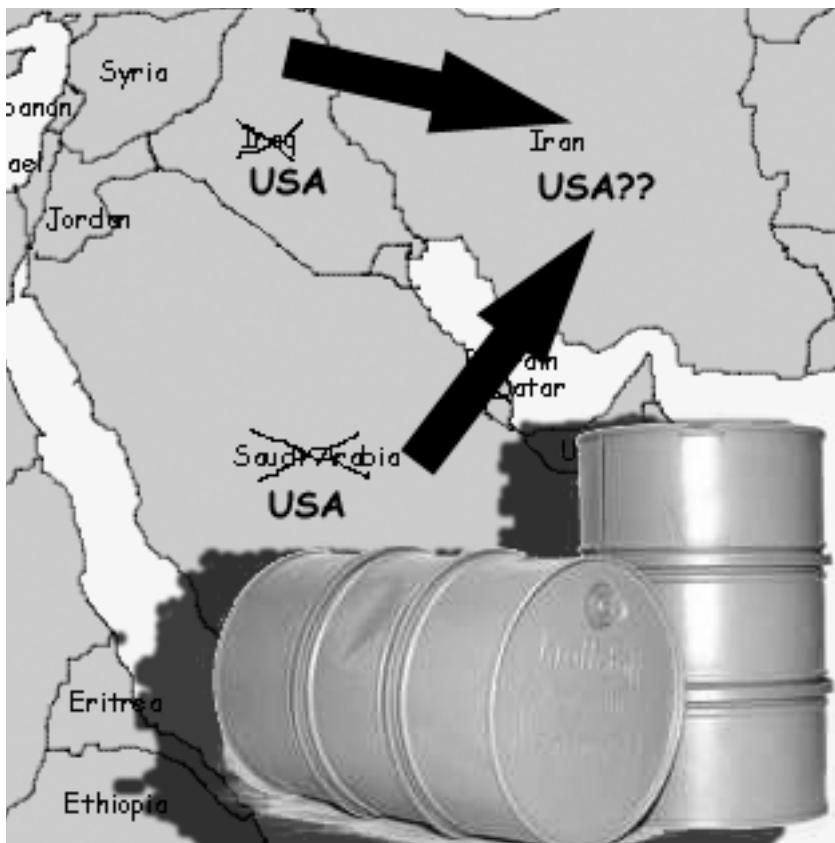
holiday. Poverty will no longer limit people's lives and experiences.

Secondly, there will be no employment, no employers and no capitalist class. Nobody will therefore be able to make decisions about the livelihoods (and, indeed, the very lives) of others. Nobody will have privileged access to the media and means of communication and so be in a special position to influence the views of other people.

And thirdly, the uncontrollability of the capitalist economy will be a thing of the past. Production will be for use, not for profit, and there will be no more gluts or 'overproduction'. With all the paraphernalia of money, accounting, interest rates and the bottom line done away with, there will be no obstacles to people producing what is wanted.

More positively, Socialism will involve people making decisions about their own lives and those of families, friends and neighbours - decisions unencumbered by so many of the factors that have to be taken into account under capitalism. The means of production (land, factories, offices) will be owned in common, and everybody will help to determine how they will be used. This need not mean endless meetings, nor can we now give a blueprint of how democratic decision-making in Socialism will work. Quite likely there will be administrative structures at different levels, local, regional and so on. This will not just be the trappings of democracy but the real thing - people deciding about and running their own lives, within a system of equality and fellowship. ■

**Paul Bennett**



*After the ongoing debacle of the Iraqi invasion, many people will be aghast at US threats against Iran. Are they serious?*

**O**n 10 May, the Iranian government began what may turn out to be a full-blown global crisis when it announced that it is to continue with its nuclear programme. Although Tehran claims it is intent on forging ahead and enriching uranium for civil purposes, the Bush administration is rehashing one of the lies that it used to invade Iraq: namely, that Iran will be manufacturing nuclear weapons that it may well give to terrorists.

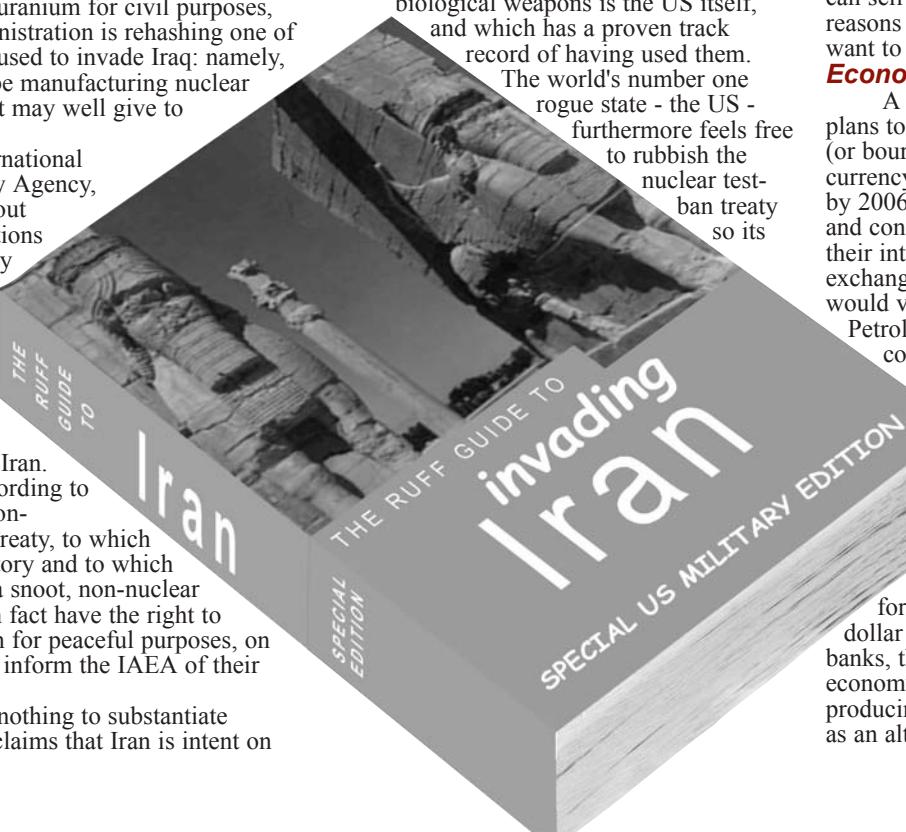
The International Atomic Energy Agency, which carries out regular inspections in Iran, recently issued a report declaring that it has found no proof of a nuclear weapons programme in Iran. Moreover, according to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to which Iran is a signatory and to which the US co-opts a snoot, non-nuclear countries do in fact have the right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes, on condition they inform the IAEA of their progress.

There is nothing to substantiate Washington's claims that Iran is intent on

producing a nuclear arsenal, yet before the Iraqi war is finished, the hawkish neo-conservative misinformation machine is at work creating fear that the US is in danger from Iranian nukes unless, we are supposed to infer, America preemptively attacks Iran.

Washington has argued that with all its oil Iran does not need nuclear energy - a statement that smacks of hypocrisy for many reasons, not least because it was Washington that enthusiastically encouraged the Shah's nuclear programme in the 1970s - and that its desire to continue its nuclear research is clear evidence of its malicious intentions. Again, whilst the US sounds off about other countries having advanced defence systems, we find that the biggest stockpiler of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons is the US itself, and which has a proven track record of having used them.

The world's number one rogue state - the US - furthermore feels free to rubbish the nuclear test-ban treaty so its



# Will Iran 'be next'?

weapon scientists can enhance the US's new theatre nuclear weapons and to develop space-based weapons systems capable of annihilating whole armies in an instant.

Iran - not so long ago named by President George W. Bush as one-third of the "axis of evil" - is surrounded by US troops in Afghanistan and Iraq (countries that have been flattened by American bombs in the past four years), not to mention the Fifth Fleet and numerous US bases in the southern Gulf States. Naturally Iran feels a little threatened so it could be that Tehran is working on the assumption that those countries that possess nuclear weapons - Israel, Russia, India, Pakistan, China, and North Korea - generally get treated a lot better by the US than smaller countries that do not.

In the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, Undersecretary of State John Bolton was credited with the words: "real men want to go to Iran". Iraq, it was suggested, was just the first stage of a five-year plan. Iran, with a larger population and better defence systems would certainly not be as placid a foe as the Iraqi forces were and US casualties would be many times those suffered during the invasion of Iraq were the US to launch an invasion of Iran. So, leaving aside the fallacious argument that Iran is intent on building nuclear weapons it can sell to enemies of the US, what other reasons could there be for these 'real men' to want to attack Iran?

## **Economic competition**

A year ago this month Iran announced plans to set up an international oil exchange (or bourse) denominated in the euro currency and that this would be in operation by 2006. For several years oil-producing and consuming countries have expressed their interest in trading through such an exchange so, logically, such an oil bourse would vie with London's International

Petroleum Exchange (IPE) as well as competing with the New York Mercantile Exchange (NYMEX), both of which are owned by US corporations.

Since the US Dollar has been so far the global standard monetary fund for oil exchange, oil consuming countries have had little alternative but use the \$US to pay for their oil, forcing them to keep the dollar as their reserve fund in their central banks, thus underpinning the American economy. But were Iran and other oil-producing countries presented with the euro as an alternative choice for oil exchange the

American economy would go through a real crisis. It is possible the crisis could come at the end of 2005 and the commencement of 2006 when oil investors would be faced with the option of paying \$50+ a barrel of oil at the American (NYMEX) and at London's (IPE), or €37 a barrel at the Iranian oil bourse. Such a choice would reduce trade volumes at the US Dollar-dependent (NYMEX) and at the (IPE). A triumphant Iranian bourse would solidify the petro-euro as one more global oil-transaction currency, thus ending the petrodollar's supremacy as the foremost international oil currency.

The international trade of oil in petrodollars has kept the US dollar artificially strong for 30 years, enabling the US to amass vast foreign-funded government debt and trade deficits. Whatever Tehran's motives, we cannot ignore the fate of neighbouring Iraq, which had already begun to trade in eurodollars

before the allied invasion. One of Washington's objectives in Iraq was to install a pro-US stooge government and set up military bases before the onset of peak of world oil production, while at the same time converting Iraq back to the petrodollar, thus frustrating OPEC's desire to begin using the euro as an alternative currency of oil transaction. Indeed, one of the first steps taken by Iraq's provisional government was in returning the country to the US oil standard.

### Geopolitics

We must also look to US geopolitical strategy if we seek the reason why Iran is seen as a threat. The country, for one thing, is strategically placed, straddling the Middle East and Central Asia and must be at least neutralised if the US is to control the region's oil supplies (it's not so much that the US wants all the oil, rather the US wishes to be in control of its distribution, to whom, and on its own terms).

The US is seriously concerned about

the onset of peak oil production (which experts say will come within ten years), that extant reserves will probably be gone within thirty years, and that long before that time China will have the same oil demands as the US. China is already securing long-term oil contracts with Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and Venezuela, seeking out oil contacts via Canada and has previously, somewhat audaciously, made a bid for the US oil company Unocal. It is thus imperative for US capitalists that a rising competitor - China, itself the world's chief consumer of grain, meat, steel and coal - is prevented from gaining a tighter stranglehold on world resources. The two countries may appear to be on friendly terms, but both are jockeying for position in expectation of a showdown.

For US capitalism, there is much at stake. Should China grow in economic strength, sell off its dollar holdings, US world domination will be threatened. Therefore, to protect future US global resource flows, Iran has to be warned by US gangster imperialists - don't mess with our interests; don't run a racket on our turf without our permission; don't deal with another mob.

Preparations to threaten, and if necessary, attack Iran are well under way. In June of last year, Israel took delivery of almost 5,000 "smart bombs" from the United States, bombs capable of penetrating six-foot concrete walls such as those that could well encase Iranian nuclear installations. There have also been numerous reports of clandestine US reconnaissance missions inside of Iran, and of US spy drones violating Iranian air space.

As we approach the final year of Bush's 'Five-year plan', expect war threats in the Middle East to feature prominently in the headlines of the world's press. We hope we are wrong - for the sake of the hundreds of thousands of workers that would die as a result of a US attack upon Iran - about war actually breaking out but history shows that where the interests of mega-business are threatened, spilling blood is of no consideration. ■

Further info available at:  
<http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/CLA410A.html>  
<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article8354.htm>  
<http://amin.org/index.html>

**JOHN BISSETT**



**Sweatshops - sewing what others will reap**

pay for not having to be their own bankers, insurers, sellers, advertisers, etc is that they have to share some of their surplus value with the capitalists with money invested in these activities. This comes about, as Marx explained in the first part of Volume III of Capital, more or less automatically through competition amongst capitals to obtain the best rate of profit resulting in all capitals tending to receive the same rate irrespective of whether the activity in question is directly productive of surplus value or not.

This is the sense in which Kaletsky is right when he said that "where in the world an item is manufactured is unimportant as long as we get the profits". The dominant section of the British capitalist class and its stewards, the government of the day, has decided to go along with the economic trend for the manufacture of certain goods to be transferred, because of lower production costs, to Asia or South America, and to get its share of the surplus value produced there by concentrating on providing services at world level that are essential to capitalism but intrinsically non-productive, mainly in the fields of banking and consultancy. It's a sign that we are already living in one world from an economic point of view.

The decline of manufacturing in Britain means a change in the composition of the working class here but it does not mean that those working in the non-productive sector of the economy are not exploited. They are, to the extent that they are paid less than the share of world surplus value their work procures for their employers.



## Cooking the Books (2)

The demise of Rover - the much-lauded

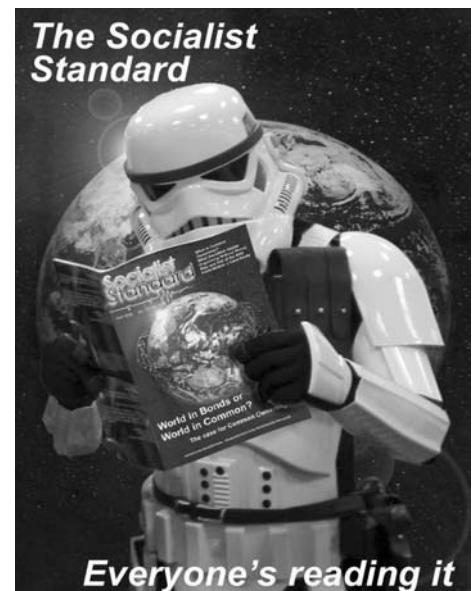
competition that is built-in to capitalism means there are losers as well as winners - has revived the debate about the decline of manufacturing industry in Britain. Matthew Parris, the former Tory MP turned journalist, recalled a debate he had last year with fellow Times columnist Anatole Kaletsky:

"I asked whether it really was true that trade balance didn't matter, and manufacturing things didn't matter, any more. Anatole argued that where in the world an item is manufactured is unimportant as long as we get the profits. I think Anatole won that debate" (Times, 9 April).

The "we" in question of course is not the wage and salary working class living and working in Britain but the British capitalist class. And, from their point of view, Kaletsky was right: all a particular group of capitalists need be interested is the amount of profits they can rake in. But it is still true that without manufacturing - somewhere in the world - there would be no profits to rake in. The original source of all profits is the surplus value produced in that section of the economy that changes the form of material things, and which includes, besides manufacturing proper, agriculture, mining, building and transportation.

Capital invested in other activities such as banking, insurance, buying and selling, advertising, consultancy and the like, which do not produce anything (despite them calling themselves an "industry"), gets a share of the surplus value produced in the productive sector. Basically, rather than productive capitalists investing a part of their capital in financing these activities essential to capitalism as they would otherwise have to, a situation has evolved whereby these activities have been hived off, as it were, to separate capitalists who specialise in them.

The price the productive capitalists have to



**Everyone's reading it**



**From left: measuring the physical development of the future workforce in the 19th century; school dinners helped feed them up for war. A typical modern school canteen, and its patrons in the classroom. Inset: school dinners providers Scolarest**

# Let them Eat School Dinners

**A** lot of people were happy, or at least hopeful, about the TV series *Jamie Oliver's School Dinners*. To begin with there was the famous chef himself, whose on-screen success persuaded the supermarket giant Sainsburys to go back on their intention of ditching Oliver as the star of their TV ad campaign and instead give him a contract for another series, boosting his pay to £1.2 million. This was because Sainsburys were also happy; while Jamie was lambasting school dinners their sales of organic produce went up by 12 percent a week. Cherie Blair was happy; her opinion of the dinners her son Leo eats at school was: "They're not terrific, to be honest. I am seriously thinking about sending him with a packed lunch". The teachers had to be happy in view of the evidence - which was available a long time before Oliver got interested in the subject - that nutrition affects a child's behaviour and response to learning. *A study Food For Thought* (2003) by Derek Gillard reported that in 1999 two schools in South London and the Young Offenders Institution in Aylesbury, both behaviour and achievement were better when diets were improved. Finally, Education Secretary Ruth Kelly was happy because, far from being embarrassed by the exposure of dietary deficiencies in the schools, she was able to claim that she had thought of it first, that when she took over at Education one of the first problems she wanted to tackle was that kids were being fed fattening, poisonous rubbish in school.

## Advertising

On the other hand there were those who were not happy at what Jamie did. Ex-Education Secretary David Blunkett did not appear to be delighted; in a rare and overdue spasm of less-than-fervent penitence he had to confess that while he was in charge of the schools he "probably" had not done enough to improve the pupils' food. The £280 million promised by Ruth Kelly, perhaps in a flush of pre-election fever, to improve ingredients and staff training, seemed likely to provoke stresses

among local and national government about who would have to make that kind of investment. Then what about the companies who make some of the food, like the infamous Turkey Twizzlers and Fish Portholes? Firms like Bernard Matthews, whose persistent catch phrase is "They're Bootifool", would not have welcomed the vengeful threat to their access to that bountiful market of under-nourished children.

Just how bountiful can be gauged by the money poured into advertising by the food industry. In 2001 nearly £200 million was spent on promoting chocolate, sweets and crisps - some of which presumably went to ex-football star Gary Lineker for his role advertising Walkers Crisps. In 2002 McDonald's advertising bill came to £42 million, including payments to Alan Shearer - another football hero - for his appearance in their TV campaign. And then there were the firms who prepare and dish out those awful school dinners; they were unhappy about the threat to their contracts with local education authorities and some of them made it clear that they were not about to surrender their rights without a fight. One of these is a company called New Schools but

## "companies fight to safeguard their profits at the cost of malnourishing school kids"

they do not actually get to heating the burgers or cooking the Turkey Twizzlers because they have sub-contracted it to another company called Atkins Asset Management, who in their turn have sub-contracted it to an outfit called Scolarest.

## Protest

*The Guardian* of 25 April reported on a protest about the food supplied by Scolarest

in the London Borough of Merton. Scolarest claimed they had not had any complaints about the food and warned that any schools trying to opt out of their contracts may have to pay the equivalent of a year's profit as compensation. Meanwhile angry and anxious parents were in no doubt about the quality of what Scolarest supplies. One mother wrote to the newspaper that her children "have rarely eaten school dinners at their Merton school because of the poor quality of the contracted-out, underfunded provisions" and a teacher at Merton, who has three sons at schools there, said "the unbalanced diet in our schools is affecting the health of our children now and will change their health for years. They deserve better". Unhappily, the protests were energised by the assumption that food is produced and processed - by Scolarest, McDonalds or whoever - in order to nourish people. That is a nice idea but it does not fit in with the logic of capitalism's priorities. "For contractors," said the MP whose constituency includes Merton, "what matters is the bottom line".

An official concern over standards of childhood nutrition is not new. A particular incentive to tackle the problem was the fact that over a third of the volunteers to join the Army in the Boer War were too small, undernourished or sick to be allowed to take part in that imperialist enterprise. This was serious, as it cast doubt on how British capitalism would fight its future wars of which, it was assumed, there would be many. Better, ran the reasoning, to start feeding the children now. The advent of compulsory education was another spur to action; in 1889 the London School Board set up the Schools Dinner Association which supplied cheap, or in some cases free, school meals. In haste a Committee on Physical Deterioration was established and from that there emerged the 1906 Education (Provision of Meals) Act, which encouraged local authorities to provide meals at schools, on the well-founded assumption that the children were unlikely to get them at home. The policy was developed between the wars

until the 1944 Education Act set out that every child in a maintained school should be provided with a meal, the full cost of which was met by the state.

### Poverty

The 1964 Labour government began the retreat from this high spot in education services in 1967, when they withdrew the 100 percent grant for school meals. In 1978 a White Paper on public expenditure opted for halving the £380 million cost of providing school meals, which led to the lowering of standards and the introduction of junk food. The big assault came with the Thatcher governments, which abolished the statutory duty on Local Education Authorities to lay on meals for all school children and then introduced compulsory competitive tendering. This opened the way for the private companies which, to screw the largest possible profit from the arrangement, introduced the cafeteria system and the provision of junk fast food like burgers and chips. The day of Scolarest had dawned.

The link between nutrition and health and behaviour seems so obvious and the evidence for it seems so overwhelming, that it hardly needs to be established through investigation. Booth and Rowntree surveyed the extent of the deeper levels of poverty in London and York respectively in the late 19th and early 20th centuries but the limits to the usefulness of their work can be gauged by the fact that when Booth began to collect his data he thought the extent of deprivation to be over-estimated and that in any case the condition of many of those in poverty was self-inflicted. The problem today is critical but in many respects different. As Jamie Oliver and many others have found, malnutrition is not always a matter of lack of food but of having access only to food which may be filling but is nutritionally deficient. That is itself related to working class poverty. At a Diet and Health Forum in October 2003 Julia Unwin, Deputy Chair of the Food Standards Agency, said

"Children a century ago were not getting enough of the right things to eat. British children today are eating too much of the wrong things. Within the last month the Health Development Agency has spelled out in chilling detail the scale of the problem we face... And hardest hit are those worst placed to react - children living in socially deprived circumstances. We are talking here about a disease of poverty."

So Jamie Oliver may not have been aware of what he was cooking up, when he set out to expose school dinners on TV. Malnutrition is an aspect of poverty, which is an inescapable reality of capitalism's class society. Food is a commodity - produced for sale and profit - like all of capitalism's wealth. That is why the companies could fight to assert the legal right to safeguard their profits, even at the cost of malnourishing school kids. It is a typically tragic mess of this social system, that children can be starved as they are fed. ■

IVAN

# Art in Capitalism and Socialism

*Will socialism be a society in which people passively consume rather than actively create art? In a post-capitalist society, will art exist at all?*



**Above left:** modern art at the Tate Modern.  
**Above right:** the cathedral-like entrance to the same gallery

**T**he first attempts by early humans, some 35,000 years ago, to represent aspects of their lives through cave paintings show that art served a useful social function, as did the use of early jewellery to enhance sexual attraction. Many of the purposes of art in capitalist and pre-capitalist societies, such as self-expression, beautification, recording history, education, entertainment and social comment, will doubtless exist in socialism, although perhaps not as we now recognise them.

The nature of post-capitalist art has been discussed by Engels, Marx and Morris, to name only three. As an artist himself, William Morris was particularly enthused by this subject. In *Art and Socialism* (1884) he contested that "the greater part of the people have no share in Art" because "modern civilization" had suppressed it. Defining art as "the expression by man of his pleasure in labour", Morris believed that art should be the intrinsic part of the labour process it had been before the capitalist division of labour had divided art from craft, and when craftsmen still worked with a sense of beauty. Socialism would not have art as such but 'work-art', and people would produce objects that were not merely useful, but also had some artistic merit.

Looking at society as it now stands, it is a fact that most children and young people are very creative. For many, childhood will prove to be the most creative time of their lives. As they get older, however, their creative output lessens until by adulthood they engage in few artistic pursuits. Instead of producing art, they

consume it in all its various forms, and some go on to learn skills of appreciation and criticism. Most, after their formal education is complete, rarely put pen to paper, brush to canvas, or whatever. Creativity seems to have withered away, perhaps because after years of secondary schooling when they are prepared for life as an adult worker in capitalism, creating art - unless they intend to become employed as artists - seems to lack purpose. When the young adult emerges from the education system, art is not likely to be pursued for its own sake, for what is to be gained by it? The chances are that the nearest a person may come to creativity is in an art therapy class, when it is used as a form of curative. But once the troubled mind has been soothed, it's back to a life devoid of creativity.

In contrast to this, socialism may prove to be an artistic renaissance in which more people produce more art than in any previous time in history. The things which historically have prevented them creating art will no longer exist: schooling, the art institution's failure to take seriously some forms of art, the art industry's failure to see beyond the profit motive, and people who may think that there is little point creating art unless someone is prepared to cross their palms with silver. But it will not be a renaissance in the style of the 16th and 17th centuries, which was restricted to an artistic and scholarly elite, and which had very little

impact on the vast majority of people. Socialism may generate a workers' art renaissance or, more specific to a classless society, a people's renaissance, at a level which touches everybody and to which no one is denied access. But that does not mean that socialist art will be good art.

### The Great and the Good

Art in capitalism has a dualistic nature. On the one hand there are The Greats: the Old Masters, the Pre-Raphaelites, even the Young British Artists, and so on, plus the various schools of art such as Metaphysical poetry, Augustan satire, and Naturalism. These comprise a small minority, but because they constitute an intellectual ruling class their ideas dominate thinking about art and their works are highly revered and among the best-known. Then there is all the rest: the vast

majority of artists and people creating art whose output

is either ignored or unrecognised. Because the people who create this art lack the privileges and advantages of the artistic elite, their work is considered substandard, if it is considered at all. It is also unknown to the wider public, or ignored by them, for they have been seduced by the cult of the great artists about whom films have been made, books written and songs sung. Van Gogh (right) is a good example of this (although he achieved nothing like this sort of recognition in his lifetime).

#### Galleries

and museums, or theatres and concert halls, seem more like temples to the idols of art, and the contemplative act of experiencing art almost becomes a form of prayer. In socialism, art will be complementary not competitive. Some artists may acquire small-scale status, but socialism contains no mechanism to allow individual artists to acquire privilege or power. So with no art institution which effectively decides what art is and isn't, and no art industry judging the quality of a work by its cost, people may be encouraged to create art. This art, however, may lack the very high quality of art produced in capitalism. Simply, most post-capitalist art may not be as good as capitalist art. Historically, artists of the greatest skill would be more likely to find patronage and success than those of less talent. Art became conceptualised as an activity of high skill restricted to a few gifted individuals of supreme talent. The art of the overwhelming majority of people, who were equally capable of producing art but who lacked the privileges of the Great Artists and whose work was inevitably of a different standard, became marginalised as rough and ready 'folk art' and not a serious aesthetic form.

It is likely that a post-capitalist society will generate a climate of tolerance and appreciation for art which lacks the skill of The Greats. We may even come to view

their works not as highly capable but as highly compromised, undermined by the need to compete against other artists of equal talent for limited opportunities in a market place, or we may see them simply as expressions of an obsolete system. This does not mean that in socialism people will no longer try to produce works of great quality and indeed some may equal in skill the art of The Greats. The idea of doing one's best will translate into socialism, but how much of the desire to do one's best is generated by the desire to out-do the best of the rival artists and compete for the few opportunities available in a crowded market? So if art in socialism is not as good as art in capitalism then it is not something which should concern us.

Art is an institution as well as a massively profitable industry, worth billions of pounds every year. This institution has a number of functions, none of which would be

particularly welcome in socialism, or particularly feasible. Currently, it defines what art is, and consequently blocks what it does not consider to be art. It promotes a cult of the individual artist as gifted genius whose brushes we are not worthy to clean.

It finances profitable art and refuses to finance art from which a profit cannot be realised regardless of its quality or importance. Because the practices it engages in are inherently anti-social, divisive and pro-capitalist, no such organisation could survive the transition from capitalism to socialism.

With this removed along with its privileges, then something like folk art or 'people's art' will emerge, that is art created by the average person without state

sponsorship or the support of the institution, and created not for purposes of individual gain or acclaim, but for other reasons such as self-expression, ornamentation, beautification and so on. The person who creates such art may not even be called an artist, for that term signifies a privileged occupation producing nothing of any practical value and necessitating community support. That a person could be only an 'artist' and produce nothing except art seems unlikely and the continuance of such practices into socialism a highly remote possibility. Just as there will be no workers, only people, in a post-capitalist society, perhaps also there will be no 'artists'. Or perhaps in socialism, everyone will be an artist.

In socialism, it is likely that art will be produced for many of the reasons it has always been produced in capitalist and pre-capitalist societies. Socialism will not be a society without emotion and people will still be moved to express themselves in one form or another and art will surely be one of those forms. Socialism will have its problems, although on a massively reduced scale compared to any previous form of society. Conflict between individuals and possibly between communities may exist. As mentioned above, the problems of capitalism have provided no end of material for artists to comment upon, as the

problems of socialism may also do. But socialism will deal fairly and sensibly with its problems and will not try to disguise them. If any 'unfairness' exists, it will not require a great painting, novel or song to expose it; it will be there for us all to see and deal with. In socialism, it is therefore highly unlikely that art which protests against large-scale social wrongs will exist.

Such works as *Gulliver's Travels*, *A Christmas Carol*, *North and South*, *Grapes of Wrath*, 1984, *Look Back in Anger*, and *Salvador* could not exist in post-capitalist society, for the issues they address equally could not exist. Similarly, there would be no socialist Kitchen Sink Dramas, Mike Leigh or Ken Loach films such as *Cathy Come Home* or *Bread and Roses*, and no Bob Dylans or Woody Guthries. And the sort of science fiction which reflects the fears and paranoias of society by turning hostile countries into hostile planets and suspicious foreigners into aliens would find little purchase in socialism, and such works as *War of the Worlds* would exist only as fantasies that have no connection to the real world. Art which reflects and comments upon alienation, war, competition, injustice and inequality, as all the above do, is ideally suited to a society of alienation, war, competition, injustice and inequality, but not to socialism. It is to be hoped, however, that socialism will produce works of the same intensity, profundity and emotional depth as the ones mentioned above. ■

NEIL WINDLE



## "in socialism, everyone will be an artist"

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# Solidarity for Twenty-Five Years



Cornelius Castoriadis

**O**ne of the features of the radical political scene in the 1960s and 70s was a magazine called *Solidarity* which used to publish long and rather boring accounts of factory life and of particular and now long-forgotten industrial disputes. There were also translations of equally long articles by someone identified as "Paul Cardan" (later revealed to be the French intellectual Cornelius Castoriadis) offering a replacement critique of capitalism to that of Marx judged outdated and wrong.

Those behind it had been in the Communist Party and, though for a short while only, in the Trotskyist Socialist Labour League. One of them was Maurice Brinton (also known as Martin Grainger and Chris Pallis), a selection of whose articles over the period 1960 to 1985 has just been published (*For Workers' Power. The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton*, edited by David Goodway, AK Press, £12), and who appears to have been its leading theoretician. Born in 1923 he died earlier this year.

What characterised *Solidarity* was its complete rejection of Leninism and the concept of the Vanguard Party and its advocacy of Workers Councils (as opposed to parliament as well as the vanguard party) as the way to socialism. In their view, a revolutionary organisation should not seek to lead the working class but simply to be an instrument that workers could use to transform society; at the same time it should try to prefigure in its organisation and decision-making what future society should be like, practising "self-management" and encouraging workers to rely on their own efforts rather than trust in leaders. So, some of what *Solidarity* was saying was more or less the same as we were. For example:

"If the working class cannot come to understand socialism - and want it - there can be no socialist perspective. There can only be the replacement of one ruling elite by another" (March 1969).

"For us, revolutionaries are not an isolated elite, destined to any vanguard role. They are a product (albeit the most lucid one) of the disintegration of existing society and of the growing awareness of what it will have to be replaced by" (February 1972).

"We consider irrational (and/or dishonest) that those who talk most of the masses (and of the capacity of the working class to create a new society) should have the least confidence in people's ability to dispense with leaders" ("As We Don't See It", 1972).

Like us, they mercilessly denounced Leninism, Trotskyism and Vanguardism as not only mistaken but as positively dangerous, as the ideology of a new would-be ruling class based on state capitalism.

There were differences of course,

particularly over Workers Councils as opposed to Parliament as well as over the continuing relevance of Marx's analyses and over the content of a socialist society. Because we saw the basic division in capitalist society as being between owners and non-owners we saw common ownership, and the consequent disappearance of buying and selling, money and the market, as a necessary feature of socialism. *Solidarity* was not so clear on this. Following Castoriadis it saw the basic division in capitalist society as being between order-givers and order-takers and so the basic feature of future society as being "self-management" (which would of course be one such feature, what we call "democratic control"). From this angle, the disappearance of money and the market was regarded as secondary: whether or not to use them being a mere policy option open to those around at the time. This became clear in the translation published in 1972 under the title *Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society* of a long article by Castoriadis, written in 1957, which was basically a blueprint for the workers self-management of a market economy.

Brinton was aware that this was controversial and in the introduction (reproduced in this book) he wrote (in a thinly disguised reference to us) that "some will see the text as a major contribution to the perpetuation of wage slavery - because it still talks of 'wages' and doesn't call for the immediate abolition of 'money'".

He was right. Some did, and not only us. Such "councilism" (management of a market economy by workers' councils, which we denounced as "workers' self-exploitation") led to the breakaway of groups which later became the "left communist" CWO and ICC of today, which despite their partial return to Leninism, at least adhered to the view that socialism/communism had to be a moneyless, wageless society.

This, in fact, is not the only place where Brinton looked over his shoulder at us. As early as 1961 he was explaining that "whilst rejecting the substitutionism of both reformism and Bolshevism, we also reject the essentially propagandist approach of the Socialist Party of Great Britain", a theme he returned to in 1974 in a review of a book on the sexual revolution which advocated achieving this through education: "to

confine oneself to such an attitude would be to restrict oneself to the role of a sort of SPGBer of the sexual revolution".

In fact, in his two main writings, both published in 1970, *The Irrational in Politics* and *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control* he felt the need to have a go at us. In the former he suggested that the *Socialist Standard* only discussed economic and political topics and ignored the problems of everyday life (not true as a look through the issues of the time will show). In the latter he wrote that we, like some anarchists, took the view that nothing particularly significant had happened in 1917: "The SPGB (Socialist Party of Great Britain) draw much the same conclusion, although they attribute it to the fact that the wages system was not abolished", adding in a wild caricature of our position "the majority of the Russian population not having had the benefit of the SPGB viewpoint (as put by spokesmen duly sanctioned by their Executive Committee) and not having then sought to win a Parliamentary majority in the existing Russian institutions". Of course, our analysis was much deeper than that.

To be quite honest such criticisms did find some echo amongst some of our members in the 1970s who eventually got themselves expelled for publishing material advocating workers' councils rather than parliament as the way to socialism. But this was later to cause a problem for Brinton and *Solidarity* since the ex-SPGBers in question became the "Social Revolution" group which, as Goodway records in his introduction, merged with *Solidarity* to become "Solidarity for Social Revolution". For all their other disagreements with us, these ex-members still retained the conception of socialism as a moneyless and wageless as well as a classless and stateless society, and insisted on the new merged group adopting this position. Brinton eventually went along with this, though reluctantly, and afterwards revealed (see his 1982 article "Making A Fresh Start") that he regarded this merger - which didn't last - as bringing to an end *Solidarity's* golden age of 1959 to 1977. Ironically, something seems to have rubbed off on him, as the last-dated article in this collection (from 1985) ends:

"A socialist society would therefore abolish not only social classes, hierarchies and other structures of domination, but also wage labour and production for the purpose of sale or exchange on the market".

Brinton is a good writer, so this book reads well and stands as a record of one strand of radical thinking in the 1960s and 70s. It goes well with the part of our own centenary publication *Socialism Or Your Money Back* that also reproduces articles from this period. ■

ADAM BUICK

### 25th Century Capitalism

**Capitalism.** By Victor D. Lippit. Routledge Frontiers of Political Economy. £65.

Lippit's main theme is that capitalism - as a system in which "a portion of the profits reaped through the sale of goods and services is reinvested, swelling the capital stock, incorporating new techniques in the process, and permitting larger sales and profits in the future" - could well continue for another three and four hundred years but that it will ultimately prove incompatible with human life on Earth. This is because its dynamic of continuous expansion and accumulation will come up against the fact that the Earth's resources and capacity to reabsorb waste are finite. This, according to him, is the basic contradiction of capitalism, not anything within its own economic mechanism or social relationships.

Lippit argues that up to now capitalism has always been able to overcome periods of slump and stagnation resulting from profits falling or markets shrinking. Such periods have always proved to be temporary and in time have always been overcome by the emergence of new favourable social, political and economic conditions for capital accumulation. Much of the book is devoted to describing what these have been over time in America, Europe and Asia. He expects this pattern to be repeated in the future and sees no internal economic or social contradiction within capitalism that will prevent it continuing for centuries. In fact, he expects it to do so. Meanwhile the global environment will continually deteriorate until human life as we know it becomes impossible (he speculates that, with the ozone layer destroyed, humans may have to live and work underground).

It's a pessimistic scenario, but how realistic is it? We ourselves have long held the view that capitalism will never collapse of its own accord for purely economic reasons and that it will continue to go through its cycle of booms and slumps until the working class put an end to it. So, in theory, capitalism could indeed continue for centuries. Obviously, we don't think it need do, or will, since we think that the class struggle between workers and capitalists built in to capitalism will lead to the workers putting an end to it before then. Lippit says that this is utopian as workers, and even the destitute populations of the Third World, will continue to support capitalism as long as it continues to improve their living standards, however slowly (as he thinks it will). The crunch will only come, he contends, when capital accumulation, and the slow long-run improvement in living standards it brings, will no longer be possible for ecological reasons but that this won't be for several centuries.

So what are we supposed to do in the meantime? And what sort of system will then replace capitalism? Lippit's view is that, when the time comes, capitalism will have to be replaced by "a social formation that is consistent with a modified stationary state", by which he means one with stable population, production and consumption levels. This implies "first and foremost", he

says, that "production must be undertaken for the use values it affords, rather than for profit":

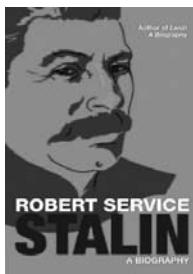
"The focus of innovation would be on minimizing throughputs rather than on maximizing output. The point would not be to bring an end to scientific creativity and innovation, but to channel it in directions that maintain and hopefully improve the ecological balance on which the maintenance of human life depends".

We would argue that this "social formation" could only be one based on the common ownership of the Earth's productive resources, natural and industrial, by the whole of humanity, i.e. world socialism, for how could production be re-oriented towards use instead of profit unless the means of production had first ceased to be the exclusive property of individuals, corporations or states? But we don't see why humanity has to wait till capitalism has nearly destroyed the planet to institute this. It could be instituted now, so avoiding not only the environmental degradation that will occur if capitalism continues for another three or four centuries but also all the wars and the destruction and misery they bring that will occur during this period too; at the same time, world hunger could be eliminated much more quickly within this framework than Lippit thinks will eventually happen under capitalism.

ALB

### The Life of Uncle Joe

**Stalin: a biography.** Robert Service. 528 pages. Macmillan. £25. ISBN 033726278



Service deliberately, and bravely, tries to dig for the true story of Stalin's life beyond the hagiography or demonography that usually represents him. He presents the case that Stalin, or Joseph Dzughashvili, or Soso, or Koba - as he was variously known - was a central character in the pre-revolutionary Bolshevik party. He was keen acolyte of Lenin, a hardman - he organised the campaign of bank robbery and extortion in the Caucasian areas of the Tsarist empire at Lenin's behest, even when the latter promised to cease such activities. He edited *Pravda*, was on the Bolshevik central committee and was Lenin's close collaborator on the 'National Question'.

He was imprisoned several times, and though taciturn with fellow prisoners, he took his beatings at the hands of prison guards with equanimity. During the civil war, he commanded the Red Army on the south fronts, where he proved to be a ruthless if not effective commander.

So, hardly the grey man Trotsky liked to pretend him to be - but Trotsky could hardly criticise Stalin for brutality, when he was as nearly as ruthless. In fact, Service makes a good case that Stalin rose to power as part of a stop-Trotsky faction.

Stalin was able to present himself as the acme of Leninist orthodoxy, and possibly - and Service does make this case - believed he really was creating some form

of socialism in the Soviet Union. Socialists - unlike Leninists - have no need to shy away from this fact. Our argument never was that Stalin was a bad man, a monster (although, obviously, he was) but that he was acting upon a false and dangerous theory - that a band of dedicated leaders could force the world to socialism.

Service makes clear that much of Stalin's apparent paranoia was based on the simple fact that he and his fellows had risen to power suddenly and almost out of nowhere against the might of Tsarism. He believed, apparently, that a similar cabal could unseat him - what comes round goes around.

His callousness was relentless, ranging from bullying subordinates at informal parties, to personally poring over the list of names and faces of victims of his terror. Service alleges a desire to be at the centre of things, to assert himself that grew from childhood and was fostered by his membership of the Bolshevik party. As he notes, Stalin was among the few genuinely working class members of the inner sanctum of the party - which goes to show that having genuine workers in charge doesn't make that much difference.

In his desk, when he died, were some keepsakes - a letter from Bukharin begging to know why he Stalin wanted to murder him when he was already politically dead, and a letter from Tito, threatening to try and assassinate him if he didn't stop trying to bump the Yugoslav dictator off - as Service notes, one gangster to another. Even his intimate moments were blood-soaked and ruthless.

This is a tidy account of the life of a utopian who thought that through ruthless will alone he could shape the world. As in some parts of his former empire, his statues are being resurrected and his reputation repaired, it also serves as a timely warning against leaders past, present and future.

PS

### Film Review

#### Indictment of Global Capitalism

##### Darwin's Nightmare



On an elevated plateau in western Africa's Great Rift Valley lies Lake Victoria, the source of the River Nile and the second-largest freshwater lake in the world. The lake supports hundreds of animal species found nowhere else on earth - or at least it did up until the 1960s, when commercial fishermen introduced the Nile perch, in an attempt to improve fishing yields. The Nile perch is a voracious predator and within years had completely wiped out many of the native species.

Almost as devastating has been the effect on the local human population, which is among the highest-density in the world. With the decline of indigenous fish stocks and the population explosion of the Nile perch, many of the millions of Africans who live and work around Lake Victoria have been displaced from their traditional

farming and fishing occupations. Out of economic necessity, they have been forced to accept positions as wage-labourers for large-scale Nile perch fisheries and packing plants. Meanwhile, processing of the invasive perch, whose flesh is much oilier than those of native species, has led to an increase in demand for firewood to dry the meat. This has resulted in widespread deforestation and the pollution of Lake Victoria from runoff.

This sorry state of affairs is chillingly documented in *Darwin's Nightmare*, which premiered at the 2004 Toronto Film Festival and is now gradually seeing wide release across Europe. Director Hubert Sauper presents us with contrasting images to reinforce the human devastation of the fishing communities in and around the Tanzanian city of Mwanza. We are taken inside the booming fish processing factories, where 500 tons of Nile perch are filleted and packed for export to Europe every day; meanwhile, two million Tanzanians find themselves gripped by a deadly famine. We see fishermen and prostitutes wasting away from AIDS; the local Christian clergy, steadfast in their religious superstitions on sex, refuse to advocate the use of condoms. An animatronic fish in a fat factory owner's office croons out "Don't Worry Be Happy" while the starving street-children outside come to blows over the apportionment of a meagre can of rice. Those who failed to snatch a handful assuage their hunger by melting down and inhaling the plastic material the factory uses to package its fish.

Perhaps the most memorable and horrific scene in the movie comes after Sauper interviews a factory official on a balcony overlooking the premises. The camera pans across the grounds and focusses on a rickety truck being loaded up with fish offal. "Don't film that truck," barks the official. Some days later, though, Sauper secretly follows the truck to a dirty, stinking landfill where its foul cargo is dumped. The air is thick with the ammonia of decaying fish, and hordes of maggots feast upon the rotting carcasses. A group of mud-caked women, crippled and sick from years of breathing the noxious fumes, crowd around the pile of offal the truck has left behind and get to work. Every scrap of fish - no matter how badly decomposed, muddy, or maggot-infested - is carefully collected and hung up to dry on densely-packed wooden frames. The factory-processed perch fillets are beyond the means of most Tanzanians to buy, so millions must instead subsist on this decaying factory refuse.

Impressively, Sauper does not single out any one person or group of people as evil-doers - not even the factory owners. Rather, the interviews and scenes depicted in the film lead the viewer to the inevitable yet unspoken conclusion that the capitalist system of exploitation itself is the culprit. "[W]herever prime raw material is discovered, the locals die in misery, their sons become soldiers, and their daughters are turned into servants and whores," writes Sauper on the film's website (<http://www.coop99.at/darwins-nightmare/>). "It seems that the individual participants within a deadly system don't have ugly faces, and for the most part, no bad intentions."

If the film has any fault, it is that it offers no solution to the problems it documents. Sauper is not at all optimistic:

"The old question, which social and political structure is the best for the world seems to have been answered. Capitalism has won," he writes with a depressing air of finality. In doing so he parrots the old social-Darwinist attitude that class society is merely "survival of the fittest" as applied to economic competition between individuals, and that capitalism is the natural order of things. It is a discredit to Sauper's talents as a researcher and observer of human behaviour that he has no retort to this untenable point of view.

Despite the filmmaker's pessimism, the documentary itself stands up well on its own as a merciless indictment of global capitalism. After watching *Darwin's Nightmare*, anyone who professes to see no causal relationship between capitalism and the poverty of Africa will be forced to think again.

Tristan Miller

## Obituary

### Benon Mutungi

Fellow comrades, we in the World Socialism Movement Uganda Group, bring to you the bad news of the death of comrade Mutungi. Comrade Mutungi Benon died on Saturday 7 May, a week after having sustained neck spine injuries in a motor accident.

I knew Benon Mutungi as early as at the age of eleven when we were in primary three (1974). At that young age his character was already formed. He was outrightly courageous, brilliant, honest and a generous pupil. This has been his character all through his life.

We later joined the same secondary school and later joined the same university - Makerere University. In 1986 in the year he joined university, he fell sick. He could not continue his studies for a period of seven years. After this break he went back to University to pursue his studies and finished his course (Bachelor of Arts, Geography) excellently. He was called back and did a masters degree.

Comrade Mutungi joined the WSM Uganda in 2000 after having been reading socialist literature for several years. He was an active comrade in most of our activities. He started the "socialist phone-in programme" on the FM Radio in this town of Kabale, writing to the main two Uganda's leading newspapers, advertising in the papers the case for socialism, lending out socialist literature and distributing leaflets, debates and many forms of activities. On return from Ireland for a second masters degree, he was requested to work as Assistant Secretary of the WSM Uganda group, a job he took over enthusiastically.

Benon died at the age of 41. He leaves a widow and four children aged 9, 7, 4 and nine months respectively. In his own words at his death bed Mutungi had this to say: "I don't think the Uganda government I know has ever made it a priority to invest in medical equipment to sustain the lives of Mutungi cases. Unless such equipment has been brought into the country a few days ago. What worries me is leaving the world still insane and worst of all leaving my very young children in such an insane world".

Mugyenyi Ishmael.  
Secretary WSM Uganda Group.

## Fifty Years Ago

### Prisoner's Story

In the summer of 1953 Rupert Croft-Cooke, a novelist by profession, was arrested on a charge of homosexuality. A few months later he appeared before the Quarter Sessions at Lewes, was found guilty on some charges and not guilty on others, and sentenced to nine months' imprisonment. Apart from a few days at Brixton he served out his sentence (actually six months, allowing for remission) in Wormwood Scrubs. His book, "The Verdict of You All," is the story of his experiences there.

Rupert Croft-Cooke, to judge by the scraps of personal information scattered throughout his book, has not been too hardly dealt with by life. Well-educated, much-travelled, a lover of things good to eat and drink, he was living a well-ordered and comfortable existence in the Sussex countryside until he was rudely awakened one night by the village policeman and two detectives. These, after due observance of the usual legal ceremonial, took him off to the local police station, and from then on he found himself in a world he had hardly known existed. "The Verdict of You All" records his reactions to, and observations of, this world into which he was so suddenly and so rudely thrown, an alien world inhabited by beings he had heard about only through the crime stories of newspapers, a world a million miles removed from the bright and comfortable surroundings he had been accustomed to enjoy.

To those who cherish comforting delusions about the wonderful reforms that are supposed to have been wrought in our prisons, this book will come as a shock. The tale told by the author is of a penal system grim, drear, unimaginative, mean, and degrading - to prisoner and keeper alike. It tells only of Wormwood Scrubs and Brixton the first a prison for first offenders serving sentences of six months and over, the second for men sentenced to less than six months ( . . . )

If it is, in fact, an essentially reliable and authentic account of life as it is actually lived in such prisons today, then it is a downright, uncompromising challenge to all the fine words that have been said about the reforms in our penal system. If it is but half true, it is a grim and sorry reflection on the efforts of those reformers who have laboured over the years to improve conditions in our prisons.

(Article by S. H., *Socialist Standard*, June 1955)



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11.00 Welcome. Tea, coffee, biscuits.

11.30 HOW LABOUR GOVERNED 1945-1951  
Speaker: Steve Trott.

13.00 Lunch break

14.00 DOUBLE-DEALING DEFENCE: LABOUR AND THE ATOM BOMB  
Speaker: Richard Headicar

15.15 Tea break

15.30 TONY BLAIR: THE GOD THAT FAILED  
Speaker: Simon Wigley.

Room 11, Friends House, 173 Euston Road (side entrance), NW1. Nearest tubes: Euston, Euston Square.

### Manchester Branch Meeting

Monday 27 June, 8pm

Hare and Hounds, Shudehill, City Centre

**'Globalised Capitalism and World Socialism'**

### Central London

Monday 27 June, 7.30pm

**THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN HISTORY NO. 1: THE SPARTACUS SLAVE REVOLT**

Speaker: Bill Martin.

Carpenters Arms, Seymour Place, W1 (nearest tube: Marble Arch).

### Lancaster Branch Meeting

Monday 6 June 8pm

The Gregson Centre, Moor Lane, Lancaster

**What will constitute criminal behaviour in a socialist society?**

## Declaration of Principles

*This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.*

### Object

**The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.**

### Declaration of Principles

**The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds**

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom,

the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



## Hard work, decency and politicians

**A**re you decent? Are you hard-working? Do you always play by the rules? If you can tick the "Yes" box in answer to these questions you should be aware that our politicians have it in mind to look after you. Both Blair and Howard are agreed that you are a specially deserving case. In a recent speech Michael Howard told us that the Britain he believes in "will give hard-working families the support they deserve. Those people who play by the rules, pay their taxes, respect others..."

and he complained in the Tory election manifesto that

"instead of rewarding families who do the right thing, work hard and pay their taxes, Mr. Blair's government takes them for granted."

This in spite of the fact that Blair has already told the 2004 Labour conference that his government planned to change Britain for better, into a country

"where hard working families who play by the rules are not going to see their opportunities blighted by those who don't." And he followed this up in Labour's manifesto, which he said was

"a plan to improve the lives of hard-working families... (and) building communities strong and safe for those who play by the rules."

But plans to celebrate would be premature. From past experience any promise by a politician to improve your prospects needs to be received warily.

### Abbey Bank

When Blair and Howard talk about their ambitions to improve the lot of hard working families they are overlooking the people - there are thousands of them - whose dearest wish is to work hard for an employer but who are denied this on the grounds of profitability. That was the case with MG Rover and with a more recent, less publicised, example of the Abbey Bank. This bank was once the Abbey National Building Society, whose business was locking workers into a lifetime of debt in order to have somewhere to live. They advertised themselves with a catchy jingle about getting the habit for being an Abbey debtor, a slogan about Abbey making life simpler and a comforting logo of a cheery family striding confidently into the future protected by an umbrella in the form of the roof of a house. That was when working for a building society gave someone a job for life, which encouraged them to work that bit harder for their employer.

Then the Abbey National became a bank, which plunged them into a savagely competitive industry where they found it hard to survive, let alone prosper. The hoped-for remedy was to be taken over by the Spanish bank Santander, who took a more robust view of the processes of employment and the reasons for people working for them - and presumably of the complacent delusions fostered by that advertising jingle and the company logo. A principal concern for Santander was their new acquisition's cost/income ratio, which persuaded them that there had to be some economies. These involved getting rid of a few thousand employees, which must have dissolved a lot of ideas about the bank being a kind of charity.

Originally Santander intended to cut about 3,000 jobs but recently their boss, Francisco Gomez-Roldan, announced that another 1,000 would have to go, which may not be the end of the redundancies. The finance services union Amicus angrily described the sacking as "an example of worst practice" but of course right - the right of an employer in the class relationships of capitalism - was on Santander's side. Gomez-Roldan was unmoved. "We want to be a strong competitor" he argued, "We have to manage the cost/income ratio". So a few thousand hard working people, who would like to be allowed to continue in that way, are joining the dole queues. Meanwhile, Santander's profits rose by 38 percent, to £820 million, in the first quarter of this year. And that logo? It too has been made redundant and is being replaced with another - of red flames - which will soon be on all the country's High Streets.

### Decent

Decency is another human characteristic which Blair and

Howard promise to see appropriately rewarded. How do they match up in this? Howard was one of the more prominent figures in the Tory governments of the 1980s and 1990s and during that time he did not amass a reputation for fastidious devotion to the truth. After the defeat of the Major government in 1997 he languished in comparative obscurity until the final months of Iain Duncan Smith's disastrous leadership. As desperate Tory MPs began to manoeuvre to get rid of Duncan Smith, Howard was asked whether he would be willing to stand for the leadership. His reply was an emphatic "no," saying that he could not imagine any circumstances, even if Duncan Smith resigned, in which he would be a candidate. Soon after that Howard was engaged in a conspiracy with other Tory leaders to nominate him and, circumventing the rule which laid down that the leader must be elected by the party membership, ensure that he got the job because he was the only candidate. This gave the Tories in Parliament the leader they wanted and avoided another Duncan Smith experience but it was an example of dishonest political manipulation.

Lies and inconsistency were an important issue in the last election, largely centred on Tony Blair and his deceptions over Iraq, tuition fees and the like. At a post-election meeting of Labour MPs Glenda Jackson recounted a common experience: "I was told on the doorstep time and again that they cannot vote for me while Tony Blair remains leader". But this kind of attack on the leadership concealed the fact that among the doubters in the Labour Party there was considerable inconsistency, not to say deceit. Let us take the example of Tony Benn, who for a long time has claimed to be the passionate, undying defender of true Labour Party values. Last December he was, as expected of him, complaining that the Iraq war was based on "a blatant lie about Saddam's possession of WMD" and he described the war as "deeply immoral and unwinnable". Again as expected of him, he has consistently attacked Labour's "shift, by stealth, towards privatisation in health, housing and education". These doubts should be enough to persuade anyone to leave the party and go into opposition against it. But when the election came Benn proved how adaptable his principles are, by telephoning wavering Labour voters to forgive and forget and get down to the polling station and vote for another period of Blair government, with its wars, its privatisation, its lies. "I am supporting Labour candidates up and down the country" was how he airily put it.

### Coercion

In February 2002 Transport Secretary Stephen Byers had to apologise for telling a lie on TV about his responsibility for sacking his press chief Martin Sixsmith. Byers' indefensible deception was justified by the then Education Secretary Estelle Morris by a peculiar, but convenient to Blair's Labour Party, definition of a lie:

"It (Byers' lie) wasn't an attempt to deceive - he couldn't possibly have thought that people wouldn't have known... What I call a lie is when you say something to somebody and hope to get away with it because they won't find you out."

That feeble and transparent attempt at propping up the unsupportable was all the more remarkable because of Morris' reputation as an unusually honest politician, the woman who later resigned from her Cabinet job admitting that "I just don't think I am as good at it as I was at my last job" and who did not stand at the last election because she could not endure the high profile media scrutiny. In that sense she was an exceptional presence in the political jungle but in another - her readiness to excuse and encourage blatant deception - she was completely typical.

The "hard work" and "decency" we are supposed to conform to and the "rules" we are driven to keep are fashioned by the needs of this class society in which privilege exists by virtue of minority ownership of the means of life. That system of property rights is supported by its "rules" - a huge complex of coercive laws and punishment - which defines concepts such as "hard work" and "decency". Political leaders like Blair and Howard work to justify that coercion and to encourage the working class - the voters - to acquiesce in its continuation. But they could not do that through any clear and consistent statement of reality; to justify the capitalist system relies on a repetition of false arguments. So the politicians who manage capitalism impose on the workers their own flexible interpretation of the rules. They need to lie, to evade, to conceal, to manipulate, because they could not do their job, at which they are notably hard-working, in any other way. ■

IVAN



**When is a lie not a lie? Er...**



# Voice from the Back

## A Money Saver

To mark the retirement, at 92 years of age, of Sir Richard Doll, one of the scientists who helped to propagate the connection between lung



cancer and smoking.

The Observer

Magazine (24 April) ran an article on the subject. It recalls that Doll's report of 1956 met a very unenthusiastic response from the government. "The Department of Health considered the report for a year. "They set up an inter-departmental committee to advise on what should be done", Professor Doll recalls. "This said - and I've seen the report - that it should be very serious if smoking was reduced, not because tax would decrease, but because they like people to die off at 65 to save their pensions."

Could the cynicism of the ruling class's lackeys be more obvious? Their idea of the perfect worker is one who left school at 15 years of age, worked for 50 years, two nights and a Sunday overtime and the day he was due to collect his old age pension dropped dead in the Post Office.

## Money Making Kills

A couple of workers, one from Invergowrie and one from Fife died in a horrific "so-called" accident. They died trying to get a couple of bob for their wives and kids. They died on an off-shore "accident". Here is what the regional officer of Amicus, the trade union had to say: "In March 2003 myself and another official put a complaint in about the lack of maintenance on Shell's Brent Charlie and Delta platforms. The Health and Safety Executive then stated in August 2003 that there was no immediate risk. Three weeks later, two guys were killed." The Times (28 April). We should mention that Shell were fined £900,000 for negligence, although as the

TU official mentioned, "In just an hour Shell will have made more than what they were fined." But, what about the guys that died, and what about their families?

## Told you, didn't we?

After all the nonsense about "weapons of mass destruction" and "regime change", the real reason for the conflict in Iraq has emerged. It is interesting to note that when Gordon Brown eventually came clean. The *Guardian* was not shocked or indignant, but could make a feeble joke about the deception. "Speaking on BBC1's Breakfast programme about the war in Iraq, Gordon Brown said the government had done what it thought was best for Britain. 'We believed we were making the right decisions in the British national economic interests,' the Chancellor added. So was Michael Moore right that it was all about oil? Or is the city commodities market going heavily into date and palm-nut futures?" The *Guardian* (4 May).



**853 years to buy this, provided the Indian doesn't spend anything on food meantime**

## Our Bettors (1)

Here are a couple of examples from the same newspaper of how the owning class live. "In a nation (India) where the average income is still less than £300 a year, Rolls Royce

has opened a dealership to sell its £256,000 Phantom car after an absence of more than half a century." ... "Princess Michael of Kent, the loose cannon of the Royal Family, has fired another embarrassing salvo, this time claiming she may leave Britain and that life is too boring now foxhunting is banned. The news that she dreams of moving to France where hunting is legal, will

doubtless delight critics of the gaffe-prone Princess, who once allegedly told a group of noisy black diners in a New York restaurant to "go back to the colonies" The Times (9 May). Off to France are you sweetheart? Bon voyage, Princess.

## Our Bettors (2)

The owner of British Home Stores has a reason to celebrate - it is his son's bar mitzvah, so he doesn't want to look penny-pinching. "Phillip Green, the wealthiest and quite probably the most flamboyant man in British retailing history, has flown more than 200 guests to the south of France for his son's bar mitzvah" The Times (14 May). According to their report Mr Green will spend about £4 million on the bash. We reckon that this is considerably more than the salesgirls in British Home Stores will spend on their nights out in a lifetime of toil in his stores, but then Mr Green has a reputed fortune of £3.3 billion. We imagine that this is a great deal more wealth than his minimum, or slightly above it, wage earners have managed to accumulate. There are many aspects of capitalism that make us vomit, this is one of them. Another is that he has engaged Beyoncé and Destiny's Child to perform at the shindig. Serves his son right, at least his daddy's wage slaves would have shown better taste.



## Free lunch



by Rigg

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